

NEEDS OF CHILDREN OF DIVORCE THROUGH DEVELOPMENT

Age	Developmental Task	Characteristics of the Stage	Signs of Stress	Child Needs
Infants (Birth to 6 months)	To establish basic trust that basic needs will be satisfied.	Child is totally dependent upon parents and has no concept of self being different from others. Child cries only to get needs satisfied. Cannot purposefully disobey or willfully misbehave. Mostly happy or mostly upset most of the time.	Excessive crying. Eating and/or sleeping problems.	Consistent response to needs, consistent schedule and lots of holding and hugging.
Infants 6 - 18 months old	To establish an attachment bond with parents.	At around 6-9 months, child normally shows separation anxiety and stranger anxiety (which are healthy signs of attachment). Child may show distress in leaving primary care giver to go with any other person (INCLUDING the other loving parent)	Crying, clinging, fear of being away from parent.	Consistency of schedule. Important not to separate infant from significant person for lengthy periods of time or to FORCE separations even for short periods of time.
Toddlers (18 months - 3 years old)	To develop a sense of independence, autonomy, and sense of self as separate from parents.	Child "test the limits" constantly in true "terrible twos" fashion. It is normal to be non-compliant, uncooperative and self-centered. Tests out personal power and separateness.	Irritability and anxiety. Excessive fears and worries. Regression to earlier behaviors. Fear of separation, clinginess and asking for absent parent.	Predictable and safe environment. Clearly defined and enforced limits (which help child feel safe and secure!). Firm, fair and consistent parenting. Very consistent and predictable schedule.
Pre-Schoolers (3-6 years old)	To learn to take initiative, control impulses, interact and play cooperatively with peers and begin socialization.	The focus is on social roles and on mimicking adult behaviors. The stage of nightmares, invented monsters, vivid fantasies, and magical thinking ("If I think it, it will happen"), which creates much anxiety. Acute sensitivity to parental conflicts and parents' moods and feelings. Time perspective is very limited (to about 2-3 days maximum) and, when appropriate, child benefits by frequent contact (by phone or in person) with other parent.	Excessive fears and anxieties including fear of separation and abandonment. Blames self for adult actions (including divorce). Shows regressive behaviors (e.g. thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, tantrums, clinginess). Shows transition distress and resistance to going with other parent.	Reassurance with hugs and holding, and with words like "I love you", "You'll be O.K.", "Your Father/Mother and I will make sure things are O.K. for you". Consistent and predictable routine, with some advanced notice and explanations for any changes in routine.
Elementary School Age (6 - 10 years old)	To learn skills to be competent, industrious and productive. Focused toward school, outside activities, and peer relationships.	Child can for the first time begin to think logically, take the role and perspective of another person, and show true empathy. No longer purely egocentric (or self-centered). Time perspective strongly developed; child can maintain close relationship with other parent even with more extended periods away from that parent.	Problems with school performance and peer relationships. With new empathy ability, child reacts strongly to parent's pain. Child acts angry, blaming, morally and righteously indignant; avows loyalty to one parent and may refuse to spend time with other parent. Child appears sad and morose.	Help with solving school and peer problems at early stage. Give reassurances with clear understandable explanations. Remove child from middle of parental disputes and/or as "caretaker" of parent. Continue consistency in routine. Make allowances within time-sharing schedule to let child's outside activities and peer friendships develop and grow.
Pre-Adolescence (11-12 years old)	To gain a sense of control over and comfort with their peer relationships.	Child achieves the development of true abstract thinking. For the first time, child is able to think about hypothetical ideas in a truly adult-like fashion. Child can now understand what variety of time-sharing schedules would look like, without needing to directly experience them. Child can fully participate in developing realistic time-sharing schedules	Development of intense loyalty conflicts. Acting prematurely adolescent, which retards true maturation. Depression and anxiety. School problems.	Flexibility of time-sharing schedule so that child can develop peer relationships and outside activities (sports, socials, etc.) away from both parents.
Adolescence (12-18 years old)	To develop separate identity from parents.	Child normally gradually pulls away from the family, physically, socially, and emotionally. Child develops interests apart from either parent and resists "family activities". Child challenges adults' ideas and asserts independence	Breaking rules and acting out. Withdrawal, isolation, and depression. Abuse of alcohol or drugs. Suicide threats or attempts. Poor school performance. Loyalty conflicts which lead to cutting off contact with one parent and avowing loyalty to the other. (Note: Adolescents often suddenly and unpredictably switch loyalties from one parent to the other, in their attempts to cope with the conflict) Youngsters may become the hurting parent's caretaker, sacrificing time with friends and outside activities.	Protection from loyalty conflicts. Consistency of rules across households. Timely professional attention to any significant school, behavioral, or emotional problems. Flexible schedule of time-sharing that shows respect for and fits the youngster's schedule first, and the parents' schedule second. Usually, adolescents prefer having one home base and spending flexible time with the other parent.

VISITATION OUTLINE

PRIMARY DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

ACCESS NEEDS

COMMON MISTAKES

VISITATION THAT MAY WORK

<p>Age:</p> <p>Develop trust; Attachment to care givers; Dependency needs met.</p>	<p>Birth to 2 ½ years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Frequent, dependable contact; 2) Daily schedule consistency (meals, sleeping); 3) Frequent but short contact with non-custodial parent; 4) Day-care same. 	<p>Birth to 2 ½ years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Alternating days, weeks or months; 2) Every other weekend only; 3) No familiar bed; 4) Long periods away from primary caregiver(s) and home. 	<p>1) Day with one parent and night with the other; 2) One day twice a week; 3) Nights at one home with several hours 3 to 4 times per week with other parent; 4) Usually <u>not</u> overnight.</p>
<p>Age:</p> <p>Role modeling; Appropriate opposite sex directed behaviors; Development of Self-concept.</p>	<p>2 ½ years to 5 years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Very reliable and frequent contact with both parents; 2) Very reliable day care; 3) Parents not conflicting with each other; 4) Consistent schedule for child. 	<p>2 ½ years to 5 years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Alternating days and weeks; 2) Inconsistent discipline between homes; 3) Different day care; 4) Every other weekend; 5) Inconsistency in daily schedule. 	<p>1) Same as above; 2) Longer visit periods, frequency less important; 3) Summer visits up to 1 week at a time; 4) Maybe one overnight per week.</p>
<p>Age:</p> <p>Social skill development; Self-esteem enhancement; Morality/conscience development; Beginning independence Sex role practice.</p>	<p>6 to 10-11 years (girls) 6 to 12-14 years (boys)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Perception of fair access arrangements; 2) Social stability and frequent reliable contact with both parents; 3) Meet dependency/loneliness issues (missing other parent); 4) Consistent discipline and rules; 5) Consistent support of child's activities. 	<p>6 to 10-11 years (girls) 6 to 12-14 years (boys)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Long travel arrangements; 2) School year with one parent and summer with other if not significant contact during school year or strong relationship; 3) Parents demeaning other; 4) Cohabiting or remarriage soon after divorce. 	<p>1) If relationships strong and homes similar: a. Weekdays/weekends b. 2 or 3 overnights/week c. Each parent 2 consecutive days fixed, alternate 3 day weekend: 2) If not: a. Alternate weekends and alternate Wednesdays; b. Up to 3 visits of 2 weeks each in summer.</p>
<p>Age:</p> <p>Completion of identity and self-confidence; Survive puberty; Attachment to peer and exploring intimacy; Emotional self-discipline and self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Up to 18 years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Perception of fair access arrangements; 2) Discipline consistency; 3) Similar rules in both homes; 4) Access to peers; 5) Parents (not child) make decisions; 6) Child involved in own activities with both parents involved and supporting. 	<p>Up to 18 years</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Forcing child to miss activities to be with other parent; 2) Letting child set the schedule; 3) Not respecting other parent or showing lack of support of other parent's discipline; 4) Parents exhibiting sexual promiscuity (child will imitate) 	<p>1) Weekdays/weekends; 2) Every other weekend plus one weekday (if arranged around child's activities); 3) Child resides in one house most of the time or clear control by consistent and cooperating parents; 4) June and July with non-residential parent.</p>